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*Intensified Collection Against Logistics Networks
Supporting Communist Activity in South Vietnam*

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DIA AND NSA REVIEW COMPLETED

18
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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

MEMORANDUM FOR: Dr. Henry A. Kissinger
Assistant to the President for
National Security Affairs

SUBJECT : Intensified Collection Program Tar-
geted Against the Logistics Network
Used by North Vietnam to Support Com-
munist Activity in South Vietnam.

1. The Problem. On 16 June 1969, you were given a joint CIA-DIA briefing on the Washington intelligence community's knowledge and analysis of the logistics network used by North Vietnam to support Communist activity in South Vietnam. At the close of that 16 June briefing, you asked me to inventory the U.S. Government's present collection efforts in this sphere and submit a paper outlining steps that would improve the quantity and/or quality of intelligence collected on this topic. In particular, you requested a list of courses of action that could:

a. Improve our detailed knowledge of the nature and quantities of supplies moving into II Corps and III Corps via the southward extension of the Laotian route complex--the "Ho Chi Minh Trail"--particularly from Route 922 (the cutoff to A Shau) through Base Area 701 and southward along the Cambodian border.

b. Improve our detailed knowledge of the nature and quantities of supplies sent to support the North Vietnamese Army/Viet Cong (NVA/VC) effort (particularly in IV Corps, III Corps, and lower II Corps) via Cambodia--i.e., supplies that did not transit Laos but, instead, came into Cambodia by water transport (either through the port of Sihanoukville or over the beaches in the Gulf of Siam) and moved northeastward to their Communist end-users in South Vietnam via roads and trails located in Cambodian territory.

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c. Help clarify and quantify--both in tonnage and percentage terms--the respective or relative contribution made to the NVA/VC logistic support structure by "the Laotian route system" and "the Cambodian route system."

2. It was my understanding that the initial response to your request should include a list of technically feasible new collection activities, or intensifications of current collection activities, framed without inhibiting reference (in this initial cut) to cost factors, current political strictures on certain forms of activity and/or activities in certain areas, or questions of priority allocation of scarce, long-lead time assets (e.g., COMINT collection platforms).

3. The Response. To comply with your request, I have convened an ad hoc interagency task force whose membership includes representatives of the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the Defense Communications Planning Group, the Special Assistant to the Chairman, JCS for Counterinsurgency and Special Activities (SACSA), the Director for Reconnaissance (JCS/J-3), the Director of Operations for the United States Air Force's Deputy Chief of Staff/Plans and Operations, the Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, United States Air Force, and both the analysis and collection components of this Agency. After we had carefully reviewed in joint discussion all aspects of the problem you posed, I asked each of my associates to submit in writing an analysis of new collection procedures or improvements in existing procedures that could be effected in those areas that fell within his office's primary jurisdiction or field of special technical competence.

4. This memorandum and its two annexes embodies a melding of all of these inputs, circulated in draft to all members of the task force and reviewed by us all in joint session. One of the two annexes to this memorandum inventories our current collection assets and procedures; the other outlines in some detail a series of action recommendations summarized in paragraph 6 below. The tripartite package of this memorandum and its annexes reflects the coordinated and agreed views of the entire task force.

5. General Considerations. Certain general considerations and certain aspects of the over-all problem you posed have directly or indirectly affected all of our action recommendations and constitute, collectively, the context within which these recommendations were framed:

a. Proving Negatives. Part of the complexity of the problem of analyzing the current utilization of the Vietnamese Communists' total logistic structure--and a good deal of the debate over the current relative roles of the Cambodian and the Laotian route systems--derives from a lack of adequate data on whether supplies are moving in any appreciable quantity, or moving at all, over certain portions of the Laos trail system below Route 922 or over certain portions of the Cambodian system opposite northern III Corps and southern II Corps. In Cambodia, for example, we have [] reports of supply movements over road and trail segments that photography indicates are impassable or not utilized by any traffic at all. In Laos, evidence we do have on the operations and utilization of some segments of the Laotian route network suggests the presumptive inference that supplies are moving over other segments of the Laotian route. We have little or no evidence of actual movement over these other segments, but this absence of evidence is hard to evaluate since the segments over which there is little to no evidence of actual movement are ones receiving a degree of collection effort appreciably less than that devoted to the segments over which we do have evidence of movement. One of the principal tasks of an integrated, expanded collection effort will be to clarify and enhance our knowledge of which segments of both route systems are not now being used. Negatives, however, are hard and tricky things to prove, particularly in short time spans.

b. Seasonal Factors: The evidence we do have in hand and the evidentiary record developed over the past years demonstrates conclusively that the Communists' use pattern of their logistic system in Laos generally shows a cyclic pattern keyed to the seasonal rhythms of Indochina's monsoonal climate. The Cambodian

pattern is less clear. Throughout both systems, the dry season is the period of maximum use, i.e., during the dry season the enemy attempts a logistics through-put to support the dry season operations in SVN, while at the same time building large logistics stockpiles in southern Laos for eventual movement to SVN during the wet season (the Southwest Monsoon). The rains have come in both Cambodia and Laos. Our increased collection efforts will hence be initiated at a time of diminished enemy activity, a fact that is certain to affect adversely the conclusiveness of the early returns from some collection programs augmented in the near future.

c. Technical vs Human Collection. Two general types of collection assets can be brought to bear on the problem here considered: technical (e.g., sensors, communications intercept platforms, and photography) and human (e.g., singleton agents, informant nets, roadwatch teams and raiding parties). Although the action program outlined below recommends an intensification of effort in both the human and the technical fields, we believe the weight of our immediate effort should be placed in the technical area.

(1) The portions of south Laos and northeastern Cambodia against which much of our augmented effort will be initially targeted constitute an extremely hostile environment in which enemy presence is pervasive and in which the enemy reacts sharply and forcefully to any intrusion. In these sparsely populated regions, there is little indigenous population we can use for cover or through which we can work. Friendly personnel, teams, or units inserted into these areas find movement difficult, must perforce devote much of their time and effort to simply staying alive, and can devote only a fraction of their attention to collecting meaningful intelligence. Because of these circumstances, the recruitment, training, insertion, support, and exfiltration of such teams or units becomes a very elaborate, complex process. In short, the intelligence return on human collection in these areas is small in terms of the effort investment required.

(2) At the present time, there is a human effort being mounted in portions of south Laos through CIA-controlled roadwatch teams (see Annex I for details). MACV/SOG also operates PRAIRIE FIRE teams in Laos and SALEM HOUSE teams in Cambodia. These teams constitute military assets which collect some intelligence but have authorized (and valid) missions other than the collection of information on the enemy's movement of supplies. PRAIRIE FIRE teams also harass and attack identified enemy targets (e.g., moving trucks or convoys) which might otherwise miss being taken under fire.

(3) Technical collection procedures have their own complexities and problems, but the intelligence return on effort invested is considerably greater than is the case with human assets operating in a hostile environment. Sensors, for example, are one of the best methods of establishing whether or not there is movement over particular route or trail segments and of pinpointing specific target areas for further investigation by human assets.

(4) The optimum technical/human assets mix does not exclude human collection activity but does attempt to concentrate it in areas where the probable return makes the necessary investment effort worthwhile. In certain areas--e.g., where terrain, foliage, or weather diminishes the utility of photography and lack of radio communications hampers the acquisition of intercept data--the human collection contribution becomes an essential link in the obtaining of complete information. Sensors can tell us whether there is movement, can frequently indicate direction and provide a rough order of magnitude of quantitative truck flow; but cannot furnish cargo descriptions as human collectors can. Thus, while we believe the mix should be weighted in favor of technical collection, we nonetheless recommend some augmentation of roadwatch surveillance in certain areas (e.g., south of Route 922) despite the serious operational problems involved.

d. Collation and Analysis Requirements.

Though we have concentrated on inventorying collection assets and devising an integrated augmented collection effort, it should be noted that the additional yield of raw information provided by the new or intensified collection programs will have to be supported with additional collation and comprehensive analysis if the full benefits of the augmented effort are to be obtained. Raw data requires processing before it becomes finished intelligence, meaningful and usable at the national policy level. The task force did not attempt to develop detailed recommendations in this field, but was in unanimous agreement that at least so long as there were major unresolved or disputed questions (e.g., "Laos vs Cambodia"), the collation and analysis should be carried out as a cooperative community effort.

e. Lead Times and Anticipated Results. The rate at which the augmented collection program, outlined below, will begin to produce meaningful results (in terms of added intelligence) will vary among the program's several components. The speed with which we begin to receive meaningful data will also be influenced by whether the early returns on debated segments of the enemy's route system are positive or negative and, also, by what the Communists themselves opt to do in the logistic support field during the current rainy season. Sensors implanted along suspect route segments, for example, should begin producing meaningful data almost immediately if these route segments are, in fact, being used for significant supply movements. On the other hand, if the route segments are not in use, it will take considerably longer for us to be confident that this "negative" has been proved. Some components of the augmented program--those which involve re-orienting or re-targeting activities already in operation--can be put into operation almost at once and should begin yielding significant returns in the very near future. Re-orientation of SIGINT platforms has been initiated in the hope that some information

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leading to answers to your questions can soon begin to flow in. Other components of our recommended augmented effort will take more time to get under way.

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Even under the best of circumstances, our augmented program will not definitively answer all our outstanding questions, but it should help to clarify most of them over the next few months.

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f. Intelligence Collection vs Reaction and Interdiction. The primary object of the augmented collection program outlined below, is to generate more and better intelligence on the Vietnamese Communists' logistic support system through which Hanoi aids and abets the Communist-directed struggle in South Vietnam. If successful, this collection program will not only produce strategic information on the totality of this logistic support system and the respective importance of the system's several components, it will also develop or identify lucrative tactical targets for allied interdiction and reaction strikes. Although the task force has devoted its efforts to developing a collection program not an interdiction program, we believe the program adopted should consciously maximize interdiction possibilities and, further, that in certain contexts, controlled interdiction can be used as one effective means of producing additional intelligence. For example, in determining the mix of human and technical assets targeted against a given geographic area, it should be constantly borne in mind that the insertion of ground teams into that area either precludes the possibility of interdiction strikes or, at best, raises thorny, complex problems of coordination, clearance, and control.

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6. Recommended Augmented Collection Program. We have framed two sets of recommendations for augmented collection efforts. One is keyed to improving our knowledge of what does, or does not, move over the "Laos system" south of Route 922. The other is keyed to improving our knowledge of what does, or does not, move over the "Cambodian system." Each of the two sets of recommendations is further broken down into the two spheres of technical and human collection. Our recommendations are summarized below and outlined in further detail in this memorandum's Annex II.

a. South Laos - Northeastern Cambodia

(1) Technical Collection

(a) COMINT/ARDF: Support should be given to increased emphasis on collection from the area south of Route 922, including a southward deployment of collection platforms over southern Laos.

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7. Suggested Follow-Up Action. The recommendations outlined above constitute, in effect, a catalogue of technically feasible actions that should be taken to improve our intelligence on the Vietnamese Communists' logistic support system. With the exception of NSA's COMINT portion, they do not constitute an actual action program since, per our instructions, they were framed without reference to current policy restrictions on activities in certain areas (e.g, Cambodia) and without attempting to resolve problems of conflicting priorities competing for scarce, long-lead time collection assets. Once the necessary policy decisions on ground rules and

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priorities are made, the list of approved actions will have to be translated into a specific series of operational plans, a process that will require further work (although the Air Staff, DCPG, [redacted] have already done a considerable amount of thorough, detailed planning). This process will also require consultation with our military and civilian colleagues in the field who will have to handle the actual execution of any plans or programs approved in Washington. If you so desire, our ad hoc task force can carry on the work reflected in this memorandum and pinpoint the policy decisions that will have to be made on rules of engagement, costs, and asset allocation in light of overall collection priorities. Once the necessary policy guidance is obtained, we can then develop an implementing paper for field consideration and Washington approval.

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[redacted]
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachments:

- Annex I - Current Collection Operations
- Annex II - Recommended Augmented Collection Program

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